

FIRE SAFETY

TALKING POINTS

Preventing Fires in the Workplace

Fires can occur in any workplace. All businesses should have a fire prevention plan that reduces the risk of a fire, and helps workers evacuate safely if a fire occurs.

Eliminating fire hazards is essential in fire prevention. Employee training and safe work practices are methods in controlling the risk of a fire in the workplace. The following key items must be addressed:

Housekeeping

All work areas should be kept clean and clutter free. The accumulation of debris and flammable material increases the risk of fire. All trash should be placed in refuse containers. Highly flammable materials, like oily rags, must be placed in airtight, self-closing covered metal receptacles. Aisles and fire exits must not be blocked.

Flammable Liquids

Properly handle all flammable liquids. If large quantities are stored in drums, they should be properly grounded. Only use approved portable containers that, when being filled, remain grounded through a bonding wire to the storage drum.

Take care to avoid accidental mixing of chemical substances that may lead to a possible toxic exposure or explosion. Use personal protective equipment designed to protect against flame, radiant heat and chemical penetrations.

Emergency Response Procedures

All staff should be trained and know what to do in the event of an emergency. Employees should be informed and familiar with the company's emergency evacuation plan and fire exit routes.

All employees and supervisors should participate in periodic fire drills. Any problems should be documented, corrected and discussed with supervisors and managers.

Fire Extinguishers

Fire extinguishers should always be visible and within reach. Only use them if you are trained and authorized. Except for specially trained responders and fire brigades, the requirement is to evacuate the fire area safely.

Visibly inspect fire extinguishers monthly and always keep them fully charged. Use the appropriate extinguisher for different types of fire hazards: Class "A" for wood, paper and cloth, "B" for flammable liquids and grease fires, "C" for electrical fires, "D" for metals such as sodium and magnesium. Multipurpose "ABC" extinguishers cover a range of fire exposures in offices and general industrial operations.

Some key fire prevention points:

- Make sure that adequate fire extinguishers are provided and mounted in readily accessible locations.
- Have fire extinguishers recharged as needed and note the date on the inspection tag.
- Instruct designated employees at least annually in the use of fire extinguishers and fire protection procedures.
- Post “NO SMOKING” signs in areas where flammable or combustible materials are used or stored.
- Keep fire doors and shutters unobstructed and in good operating condition.
- Check and maintain automatic sprinkler system components as required.
- Ensure that sprinkler heads are protected by metal guards if they are exposed to potential physical damage.
- Maintain 18 inches of clearance below sprinkler heads.
- Place combustible scrap, debris and waste materials (oily rags, etc.) in covered metal receptacles. Promptly remove this material from the worksite.
- Store materials properly to minimize the risk of fire.
- Use approved containers and drums to store and handle flammable and combustible liquids.
- Keep all flammable liquids and solvents in proper containers when not in use.
- Ground bulk drums of flammable liquids and bond them to containers during dispensing.
- Ensure that storage rooms for flammable and combustible liquids have explosion-proof lights and proper ventilation.
- Separate oxygen cylinders in storage from fuel-gas cylinders or combustible materials (especially oil or grease), by a minimum distance of 20 feet or by a noncombustible barrier at least 5 feet high having a fire-resistance rating of at least one-half hour.
- Promptly clean up all spills of flammable or combustible liquids. Dispose of cleaning materials properly.
- Only use approved space heaters. Do not place them near flammable or combustible material, or leave unattended.